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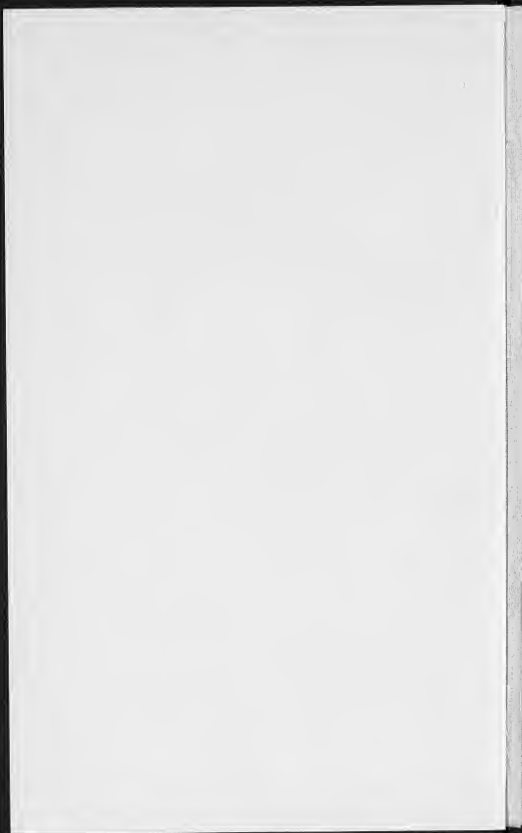


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THE  
AGRICULTURAL  
DEPRESSION.

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## THE AGRICULTURAL DEPRESSION.

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THE depressed state of agriculture is one of the most hackneyed subjects of the present time. One cannot look into the farm papers, or attend a meeting of farmers anywhere, without finding that the "bad times" are sure to come uppermost for discussion. Not only so, but the ordinary newspapers, journals, magazines, &c., have all devoted more or less attention to the matter, while it has been the source of a vast deal of Parliamentary enquiry. The proposals which have been made whereby farmers might be helped are innumerable—some of them worthy of serious consideration, some of them ridiculous. The present writer is not in a position to offer any fresh or startling plans, but it seems to him that there might be more light thrown on the matter if we set about finding out what this agricultural depression really is, and who the particular people are who are agriculturally depressed. The result of the enquiry will show that farmers have within themselves the power and ability to meet the changed times if the way were only pointed out, and that by one of their own number. In this, as in other walks of life, "self-help" is the best kind of help.

If we go to any of the stock and implement shows, we are impressed with the immense display of farm produce and machinery—representing thousands of pounds worth in value—while the great concourse of well-to-do people, who are all supposed to be connected with farming, does not give one much idea of the existence of depression. An enquiry into the state of any of our agricultural societies will in nearly every case show that the number of members is yearly increasing, the number of visitors keeps up, the number of entries is no less if no more; everything tends to prove that they are in a flourishing condition, and they do not give any indication of the evil state in which farming is said to be—at least a townsman would have some difficulty in finding where the troubles he had heard of and read about were in existence. If we attend markets and other meetings of farmers, the jovial faces and rotund forms met with indicate the very reverse of a hard-up state of matters; it is clear, therefore, we must

look much deeper and closer for the evil, as, on the face of it, matters appear to be no worse than they used to be.

The great cry is that prices have fallen so miserably low that farmers cannot pay their rents and get ends to meet. Prices certainly have fallen, and we may put it in round numbers that the value of produce as a whole is some 25 per cent. less than it was, say ten years ago, in the so-called "good times." We cannot gainsay the fact that many farmers have found, and will yet find, that they are unable to hold on under such circumstances, and therefore have had to succumb. The great reductions in rent which have taken place all over the country, and the great extent of unoccupied land which has been—if not now—in existence, is sufficient proof that they—(that is, *some*)—have found it impossible to live. When we come to reside regularly in the country however, farming land and mixing every day with farmers, we find out a lot of things about the different phases of this depression; its causes are beyond our ken, or otherwise they are not different from those which have produced the general bad state of trade all over the world, be they a scarcity of gold, overproduction, competition, or any other possible cause; but the means of meeting it, and of adjusting ourselves to the altered state of matters, are as plain as a haystack.

It cannot be foreign competition altogether which has brought all these woes upon us, because farmers in America, the Colonies, and elsewhere are as badly off as ourselves, so that all tinkering with the present system of "free trade" is quite uncalled for. Neither can it be from overproduction that we are suffering, because farm produce must for the most part be consumed within a limited time from its production, so that though there may be temporary gluts of the market, or even for a whole season, they cannot be permanent or be answerable for a state of matters which has been going on now for over ten years. Further, there are as many people in the country to consume this produce as there were in the past, if not more. It has been said that the recent opening up of the great wheat fields in the Far West has done us farmers here a lot of mischief; it would be very difficult to prove this in the face of the fact that wheat is only a very small item in the total farm produce of the country, being, for instance, only 5 per cent. of the crops in Scotland and 4 per cent. in Ireland, leaving other matters out of count. Of course a great fall in the price of one article affects the others, but a rise in the price of wheat would benefit only a very small section of the farming community, while it would be a direct injury to the nation at large. As regards beef and mutton, our other staples, the difference in price is from 10 to 20 per cent. less than it was about fourteen years ago. On the



whole, therefore, there is no doubt but that the value of farm produce has fallen considerably as compared with what it used to be in the past; but even this simple and self-evident statement requires to be placed in a new light.

The price or value of anything is what it will bring in the open market—but dearness and cheapness are relative terms. Because any article is sold for so many shillings or pounds less now than it used to be, it does not follow that it is any cheaper in reality. If money in itself has become more valuable, then less of it will represent the price of anything; while, on the other hand, if every saleable commodity falls in value at the same rate per cent., then there is practically no fall in price at all, as everything is at the same comparative level that it was before. A real cheapening of any article can only take place when everything else remains stationary, or when the one item remains stationary and everything else rises. In this lies the key to the proper understanding of the cash relationships of the various matters connected with the farm, and the accommodating of ourselves to this one of the chief ways of meeting “the depression.”

It is not easy to say what is the average difference in value of all the various products of a farm between the present time and say ten or fifteen years ago. Wheat has fallen say 40 per cent., wool the same, beef 17 per cent., while mutton has not fallen so much. Dairy produce we may put at a drop of 20 to 25 per cent. In estimating figures it must be taken into consideration that, where a small price is the result of an article being inferior, it is not just to charge it to the bad state of trade when it is really due to the ignorance or inefficiency of the farmer himself. To take a case in point, good cheese will still fetch from 50s. to 60s. or more per cwt., while there has been some stuff sold as low as 20s. Clearly this latter price must be largely due to the farmer's own fault, and not to any general lowering of values.

Let us say, however, for the sake of example, that the prices on an average are 25 per cent. less now than they were in the past, that is, £100 of produce will only bring in £75 now. If, then, we can show that not only everything we have got to sell is lowered to this extent, but that also everything we have got to buy is likewise lowered—or about to be, or could be, or should be lowered—the problem becomes very much simplified, if indeed it does not disappear altogether.

#### RENT.

Let us take the several principal items of outlay on the farm, beginning with “rent,” and find out how they stand, or might be made

to stand, now-a-days. Gathering money for the rent is generally uppermost in most farmers' minds, but from certain returns, procured by Sir James Caird, it is shown that the general rent-roll of the country has been reduced some 25, if not 30, per cent. This of course does not represent the reduction to the landlords, which is generally a great deal more; for the simple reason that whatever burdens there may be on an estate in the shape of tithe, mortgages, allowances to younger members of the family, &c., such remain fixed, and therefore the landlord has to bear all the loss. Thus 25 per cent. less rent for a farm may be 50 per cent. less to the income of the owner. Further, a reduction may not always take the form of money, but may be in the shape of improvements at the landlord's expense.

There are, of course, a vast number of cases where the tenants are still running leases contracted in the times of inflated prices: these are the men to be pitied, where the landlords are not generous enough to set them free. With these farms, however, there is usually a large drop whenever they come into the market—a state of matters we will consider further on. But the fact remains, nevertheless, that rents are lowered, or being lowered, to suit the times, and not only so, but the scarcity of substantial and reliable men has lessened competition, so that a tenant has now practically the ball at his own foot. He can insist on the abolition of all irksome restrictions as to cropping, selling produce, &c., and demand having everything reasonable and more in accordance with the advanced scientific spirit of the age; if such things are not willingly conceded then the plenitude of farms may make him less anxious, as he can try elsewhere.

We often hear farmers grumbling about the high rents they have to pay: "Rents must come down;" "farms are too dear," &c. The question very naturally arises in one's mind, who are they that fix the rents? In the great majority of cases it is the tenants themselves. A landlord or agent advertises a farm to let, a number of men go and examine it and each sends in an offer; it is presumed that practical farmers know the value of land, and satisfy themselves of the capabilities of a farm before offering; and it is further presumed that sensible men offer as much rent as they can reasonably expect to pay, *but no more*. If several offerers are of equal standing as farmers, it is a very natural thing that the owner or his agent should accept the one whose tender is highest; and it is difficult to see that he is to blame in this. The tenant who gets the farm has fixed his own rent and agreed to the other terms of the contract. If he finds out, in the course of a year or two, that he is rented too highly, who is there to blame but himself? There were of course many things which contributed to

compel him to give more than he really thought he was justified in doing. Inordinate competition was the worst of these, this competition being due to, or at least largely fostered by, the iniquitous laws of Hypothec and Distress. By means of these a landowner was entitled to his full rent and all other claims—in the event of a tenant's insolvency—before any other creditor (excepting a servant) could get a penny. The practical outcome of this was that agents were very careless as to the kind of men they accepted for tenants. Provided that their credit was good enough to stock the farm, that they offered the very highest rent, and agreed to restrictions however offensive and absurd, the owner did not need to fear any risk as he was sure of his rent. Further, the great amount of pleasure to be derived from a country life, and the high prices realised at one time for produce, tempted many townsmen of every trade under the sun to take to farming. The accession of these always formed a very large contingent among would-be tenants, and thus competition was always keener and wilder, so that *bonâ fide* men had to offer above what they considered fair value to enable them to get a farm at all. These matters certainly had a very large bearing on the fixing of the rent; and one of the good results of the depression is to make agents more careful as to the kind of men they take for tenants, seeing that Hypothec is abolished in Scotland, and Distress of less account now in England, and also that the “tinker and tailor and candlestick maker” are not so ready to burn their fingers as they used to be. It is not easy, however, to get owners to understand that land was raised above its fair value in the times of high prices, and that it must have a correspondingly great fall now that this adventitious competition is withdrawn. The fact remains, however, that rent has come down, or will do so, in about the same ratio as the general fall in the price of farm produce. Where it has not yet been accommodated to suit the times it must either be due to the folly of men in offering too much, or else to the ungenerous behaviour of landlords who keep tenants that are still running long leases, without relieving them somehow.

#### WAGES.

We come now to the other great item of expenditure on a farm—the wages. In considering the part it plays in the successful or unsuccessful tenancy of a farm, there are many things to be taken into account. It has often been said that the most difficult part of farming is the management of servants; and on the individual abilities of a man in this line depends a great deal of his success. “Keep down the labour bill” is a cry we often hear, and certainly it is very good advice

if acted on in the proper way. A great many farmers keep more men and horses than they have really any need for, and this may be due to their own inability to plan the daily work properly, to being too easy-going, and thus not get a fair day's work out of their men for a fair wage, or—what has now-a-days become of greater importance—to not pursuing a system of cropping suited to the altered state of matters, that is, having too much under the plough, with immense expenses for cultivation. Horses as well as men cost money, so that there might be a considerable saving in this department alone. An example might show up this matter better, especially as it is within the writer's own knowledge:—A large farm in the south of England was vacant, but being worked by the landlord, the two previous tenants having gone out of it bankrupt. It was taken by an energetic Scotchman, and it is interesting and instructive to note the transformations which took place. Twenty-one workhorses had been kept on the farm; the new man started with ten and afterwards reduced to six. Twelve to fifteen men had found regular employment all the year round; six men, two lads, and two women, were found amply sufficient, except in hay and harvest time, under the new *regime*. The arable portion of the farm, some 350 acres, was reduced to 90 acres by sowing down to three and four year's lea, at a cost of under £1 per acre for seed, thus converting the perpetual ploughing into a six or seven years' rotation. A dairy of 60 to 70 cows was started, the hands to work which are included in the above six men, two lads, and two women. Previously 100 acres or so of wheat had been grown, now there are only 10 to 15 acres. The wasteful and expensive system of bare-fallowing was done away with, while the land was kept clean by roots or by growing heavy crops to smother out the weeds. The farm was taken at 25 per cent. less rent than it had yielded in the good times, and, though it was prophesied by the neighbours that the new tenant would not earn bank interest on his money, he actually did make 8 per cent. the first year, and about 12 to 15 per cent. per annum afterwards. This was simply brought about by a more energetic handling of workmen and better planning of work, while the judicious change in the style of farming rendered fewer men and horses necessary. Following a similar plan is the secret of "keeping down the labour bill." We often hear it said that wages are too high, that they are a long way above what they used to be in the past, and that they have not come down in proportion to other things—especially bread. There is no doubt a great amount of truth in this: there has not been a great decline in the price of labour, certainly not more than an average of 10 per cent., but this is not so bad as the fact that in many cases (though

not all) men will not do as much work in the same time as formerly. They want shorter hours, will not work past their set times without grumbling, no matter how pressing the necessity, and even during regular work hours do not keep as steadily and smartly at work as they ought to do. This of course is and will be gradually remedied; and in fact there is nothing to complain about on this head in many districts. The stoppage of public works and the lessening of the area of arable land has the effect of increasing the supply of men for farm labour, so that masters can pick and choose more than formerly, and the inferior ones will have to go to the wall. But after all it cannot be said that farm servants are highly paid. A man whose yearly income is represented by from £40 to £50—the usual rate of wages of ploughmen—must be very inferior if he is not worth that sum, for it is difficult to see how one can live at all and bring up a family on less money. In some parts of the country the rate of wages is a deal less than this, and the masters say the men are not worth their pay, and perhaps say so justly. One reason for this is not far to seek: a man receiving small pay is not able to buy food enough for his proper sustenance, so that in the course of a generation or two the peasantry of a badly-paid district degenerate both physically and mentally, and thus become less valuable workmen. It is a curious fact that in some of the northern counties, as in Northumberland, or in Scotland, where the rate of wages per man is highest, the cost of labour per acre is lowest; while, on the contrary, in some southern counties, where the men are underpaid, the cost per acre is very high. It does not follow, however, that raising the pay all round in these latter places would have a good effect: pay is regulated by the supply and demand of labour, and the type of men cannot be improved all at once, but the facts are as stated.

We may take it as a foregone conclusion that wages will never be any lower than they are at present, but may even rise as a higher degree of skill becomes necessary, unless some great and unforeseen change occurs in other matters; and that really and truly it is not desirable that they should fall below a sum sufficient to procure the necessities of life. One shilling per week less in the wage of one man may be equivalent to from 5 to 10 per cent. of a drop to that man, while to the master it is only equivalent to £26 per annum on ten men; if a master employing ten men needs to save himself by screwing £26 a year out of them he must be in a very bad way indeed.

It is in the *number* of men and horses employed on a farm that there is the greatest room for economy and improvement, and in the opinion of the writer in this lies one of the real solutions of the question. On the average a man and a pair of horses cost £100 per annum to main-

tain, so that for every plough less that a farmer keeps—provided everything else is right—there is a clear gain of £100. Of course the principal way to do this is to reduce the acreage under the plough by putting down to grass—not necessarily permanent pasture, but rather a three or four years' lea, or for even longer. This land can be either grazed by stock or cut for hay, perhaps both alternately, and this with satisfactory results both to the land and the farmer. The system of rotation grass is more to be recommended than that of laying away to permanency altogether. It costs less per acre for "seeds," allows of ploughing up at some future time if desirable, grows a greater amount of fodder from the fact that there are not so many of the natural grasses present, and is practically "permanent" for all ordinary purposes. We have found the following mixture generally suitable and exceedingly successful, especially on stiff clay soils:—

$\frac{1}{2}$	bushel	Perennial Ryegrass,
$\frac{1}{4}$	"	Italian do.,
5	lbs.	Timothy,
2	"	Meadow Foxtail,
3	"	Tall Fescue,
3	"	Cocksfoot,
3	"	Red Clover,
3	"	Cowgrass (perennial),
2	"	White Clover,
2	"	Alsike,
2	"	Trefoil ( <i>Medicago lupulina</i> ), or Lucerne.

Though originally intended for a three or four years' lea, it is as good as permanent, and has continued to grow large crops of hay or graze well for several years, and improves as the time goes on. The cost of seed was under £1 per acre, and the land can be cultivated again should the tenant desire to do so at any future time.

The extent of the saving which may be effected in labour by the sowing down into temporary "seeds" is easily estimated. It is usual to keep one plough for every 100 acres on a mixed husbandry farm, where one-half is always in grass and one-half cropped; that is, one man and a pair of horses will plough and otherwise work 50 acres every season. As the cost of these is £100 per annum, it follows that there is a saving of at least £1 per acre per annum for every acre so treated, after making allowance for the other labour needed under a different style of management. Of course a farmer must not rashly go in for so much grass without knowing how he is going to dispose of it. Cutting for hay is the cheapest and handiest plan where a market can

be had for it, but then under this system the land will very soon cease to bear a fair crop, and manure, especially farmyard manure, must be applied. It would be more satisfactory to feed stock—preferably sheep in the present state of the markets—on it alternately; sheep pay as well as dairy cows, and better than anything else in the experience of some, while their rich droppings, and the even way in which they are distributed, tend greatly to improve the grass. Of course more stock on the land means more capital, and this seems foolish advice in these days when farmers' capital is greatly reduced, but then so has the price of all animals, so that £5 or £6 per acre will go as far now as £8 or £10 did a few years ago.

### PASTURE.

In connection with the subject of laying down to grass it may be here pointed out that much wider issues are involved than the saving of labour only, as the other results brought about are not of one whit less importance. It is of course a known certainty that the cropping and cultivation of land tends gradually to make it poorer, as every crop removed from the farm means the abstraction of a certain amount of mineral and nitrogenous matter from the soil, and if nothing is done to make up for this the land will eventually get run out. But cultivation has worse effects than this. The soil, in a natural state of grass, contains a great amount of organic vegetable matter or humus in the top layer or turf; and Sir John Lawes and others have shown that the function of this is to retain nitrogen in its various compounds, as also a certain amount of moisture which is beneficial to plants. When a soil has got no humus or living roots in it—as is the case with ordinary bare-fallow—there is nothing to retain the nitrogenous compounds, and the result is that every shower of rain which falls tends to wash out these into the drains, so that in the course of time the soil becomes poorer and poorer, and this apart from the effects of cropping. Further, any manure which is put on gradually shares the same fate, and soils which are deficient in vegetable matter—or clay, which has the same action to a certain extent—are emphatically known as “hungry,” from the fact that fertilising substances waste away so quickly. The action of cultivation is to destroy this humus which may have originally been present. It is largely composed of carbon and water, and when the living part of it is killed, and the whole exposed to the action of the air, the carbonaceous material becomes gradually oxidised—literally, burnt up slowly—so that in the course of years nothing is left but the inert mineral part which is mechanically equivalent only to so much sand or powdered rock. This is why a newly broken-up grass field yields so well for a year or

two; and why the lighter class of soils get so easily run out; and why large doses of manure (especially farmyard manure) are periodically needed to keep up the fertility; and why, in some cases, the soil refuses to grow either the quantity or quality of produce that it used to do, no matter how much artificial manure is put in. The great superiority of cake-fed dung for all crops under all circumstances does not so much depend on the absolute amount of fertilizing ingredients it contains as on the fact that these are combined with a large amount of carbonaceous material, so that the phosphates, nitrogen, moisture, &c., are held till needed by the plants, while the mechanical texture of the soil itself is improved. There are many poor soils and thin hillsides which have been practically ruined by cropping in the years of large prices which have been since the Crimean war. The thin natural turf had taken ages to form, it had always a certain value for grazing, but once it had been broken up and destroyed there was no chance of reforming it within the limits of an ordinary lifetime, even with the most careful selection of "seeds."

From these facts it will be seen that, besides the economy of labour on a farm, there is the greater economy of fertility by putting down into grass for three, four, or more years, as the vegetable matter again accumulates in the soil, and all manures put on are retained. It is certain that much of our arable land would be greatly benefited by being laid away in grass for a time; even if it only paid its rent it would be an ultimate gain.

### STOCK.

As already mentioned, more grass means more stock; and it has often been pointed out in the *Agricultural Press* that more stock-keeping is one of the ways to meet the depression, and with good reason. It is a notable fact that farmers who have had a large proportion of stock have weathered the storm much better than those who were purely arable. This is due to there being less working expense connected with cattle and sheep, while their manure was the cheapest and handiest and best stuff wherewith to keep up the fertility of the land. There is always some profit with cattle (though it may be only .5 per cent.), more with sheep, and sometimes still more with dairy cows—and we might in many cases increase this by lessening the cost of production. If the inlaid price is too high, then farmers must just start breeding for themselves and thus save all the profit of the breeder and dealer, while the more extended use of home-grown food saves outlaid money in this quarter. In common with many others we have found that there is profit in this system when



everything else is right, and therefore feel justified in advising arable men to consume as much of their produce at home as possible; and, further, to produce the stock themselves to eat this produce.

### MANAGEMENT.

Next to economising labour, by reducing the cultivated area, comes more energetic management and constant supervision on the part of the farmer himself. In many parts of the country this advice is entirely unnecessary, as the farmers themselves are the hardest workers on the farm, early and late, being their own foremen, and doing everything that is in their power to make things go well. In other places, however, and notably in the south, there has been, and is even now, a great tendency to live as country gentlemen; late rising; management left to a bailiff; attending markets three or four times oftener in a week than is necessary; foxhunting and sporting; not to mention many other expensive personal habits. It does not need a man with more than half an eye to see that this style of thing cannot go on very long now-a-days, however suitable and agreeable it may have been in the past. Personal enquiry, in the case of many farms which were recently vacant, elicited the fact that the old tenants had themselves largely to blame for failure; their own incapacity, and aping at gentility—in one or two cases drunkenness—was the sole cause of want of success. The greatest proof that this is the case is derived from the fact that those who lived and farmed in this style have been, or are being, crushed out of existence, and their places taken by hard-working, frugal, skilled men. It is a notable fact that the winners of the R.A.S.E. Prizes, for the best managed farms, all come within this latter classification; and none of them have felt the “bad times” to any very great extent.

In this, therefore, there is great room for improvement with a large proportion of farmers; more personal thrift and more personal attention to all the little details of farm management. It is of course quite easy to go to the opposite extreme and be too much of a worker oneself, and thus suffer the general management to go wrong. There is a proverb in Scotland to the effect that one may “lose bottles\* gathering straws,” and a farmer must work as much with his head as his hands, but the point is that he must personally attend to the details of his business. Many have failed from sheer incapacity to manage a farm, or from taking things too easy.

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\* A “bottle” is a bundle of straw.

## SERVANTS.

We come now to another subject needing an overhaul, and that is the servants themselves. The improvement of these will be perhaps one of the most difficult things to bring about of any of the matters hitherto mentioned. The class of servants found in any particular locality are the product of a great number of factors, social and otherwise. The plenitude or scarcity of work, the style of farming, the general character of the masters, the number of public works—such as coal mines—where large numbers of men are employed in limited spaces, all have an effect on the character of the farm labourers native to that particular locality. It is not possible, and it is not desirable in every case, to alter any of these matters—at least on short notice, though many of them have a deteriorating effect on labourers from an agricultural point of view. A man who has been at work where the eight or nine hour system prevails, takes it badly to return to farm labour where ten to twelve daily is the rule, while he will absolutely refuse to work overtime. No doubt in some parts servants could not be expected to do more in a day than they regularly do at present. Ten hours' work in the field with the horses, and about a couple of hours indoors in addition, make up a long day's work, so that if they keep moving with anything like reasonable speed they are bound to get over a lot of ground. In those places it is hardly necessary to say that the pay is higher and the rate per acre less than where a short easy time prevails. We are acquainted with cases where the men start work at 6 a.m., have half an hour at 10 o'clock, and unyoke at 2.30 p.m., the rest of the time, to 5.30 p.m., being taken up with grooming horses and doing yard work. Under such a style of management it is not to be wondered at that the men are underpaid, underfed, and underworked, while at the same time the master's labour bill is greater than is the case with the long hours' men; they might easily work a couple of hours longer in the field with good results all round.

There is a great lack of what may be termed *esprit de corps* among many farm servants, they do not take as great an interest in their work or in their masters affairs as they might do. In this, however, it is doubtful if the masters themselves are not to blame. In the olden time it was the custom for all to sit at one board, and hired servants were treated as if members of the family, with the result that they were faithful workers, and often stayed all their lives with one master. Now-a-days, this is all altered, and it is impossible that we can go back to the old way. The style of living is changed, the facilities for travelling have fostered a roving spirit among many, while the

ungracious manner of some masters would spoil the best-intentioned servants in the world, and prevent them from taking any interest in their work. At the same time we have seen so many cases of ingratitude for favours bestowed, that it is difficult to advise masters to be more considerate with men. So much has this been the fact that in many places it is proverbial that the more you do for a servant the less he will do for you. Nevertheless, a little discriminate kindness and bestowal of favours would in many cases cause a labourer to exert himself to discharge his duties to the best of his abilities. Sometimes employés are deficient in the commonest honesty, not that they would actually steal, but they defraud their employer as to their time and work; in such and kindred cases it is of course the wisest policy to get quit of them as soon as possible—to keep on selecting till the best are arrived at.

In the one matter of the drinking habits of our work-people alone there is great room for improvement. In the north it is whiskey and in the south beer which is the great curse of the labouring man, and, of the two, beer is the worst. A whiskey drinker only gets on the "spree" at stated intervals, and seldom does any harm to his master, while a beer drinker is always boosing at it, especially in hay and harvest time, during these seasons being often incapacitated for work in the latter part of each day. It does not require one to be a believer in total abstinence to see that a couple of gallons of beer put inside a man within ten hours must result in harm, both to himself and his master's work. It is a matter which we cannot rectify all at once, and probably it will take another generation and the greater spread of education to alter the habits of our work-people in this respect, but there is not the slightest doubt that the increase of temperance would be a direct benefit to farmers; and those masters are doing a great amount of harm to themselves and their profession who encourage drinking habits.

### MACHINERY.

The use of labour-saving machinery is a matter of great importance now-a-days, and has rendered us independent of hand labour to a vastly greater extent than our forefathers, while it helps to lessen the labour bill to a certain degree. It is, of course, very easy to overdo the matter, and no one should rush to buy every new tool that comes out until it has been well tried. The mower, horserake, steam thrashing-machine, and many others are indispensable implements of the farm, and we may now pronounce the string-binder a perfect success, and a machine which will cheapen labour and give us complete control over the most difficult and troublesome work of the year—harvesting.

The use of machinery is not necessarily a direct saving in money paid for wages—often the reverse—as the work is simply transferred from the unskilled labourer in the field to the skilled (and more expensive) artisan in the workshop. But there is a great gain in time, in control of men, and in efficiency and tidiness of work. In the case of the string-binder, for instance, the first cost of the machine and the price of the string per acre may amount to more than it could be done by hand in the usual way, but then there is the great speed at the time when speed is of the utmost importance, while the fact that one machine is more easily managed than half-a-dozen saucy and bumptious men is not the least benefit to be derived.

### BOOK-KEEPING.

It is pretty safe to say that not one farmer in ten keeps a set of books whereby—like other business men—he might know how his affairs stand at the end of the year. Some, or perhaps a great many, keep some sort of note-book to assist their memories, but the great majority think that so long as they have a balance at their bankers', that is all the kind of book-keeping they need. It is certain that not a few would be astonished and get their eyes opened if their affairs for a year were put down on paper and a balance sheet and profit and loss account made out. The fact is that very few farmers know what their income is, but when everything is taken account of it often works out to ten, fifteen, twenty, thirty, and in some cases more, per cent. on the capital invested; but because the recipients keep no books they are quite unaware of this, and honestly believe that they cannot make a living at farming, that "times are bad," &c. We are personally acquainted with many such cases, and any one may find them out for himself by simply estimating the value of the live and dead stock on a given farm, then estimate the cost of living of the farmer and his family, and see the percentage which works out.

In calculations of this kind it must be borne in mind that the living which a man gets off a farm, and which never takes the shape of money, is just as much income and interest on capital as is the surplus money (if any) which goes into the bank. This is specially to be noted, as many farmers never seem to take it into account, and would be quite angry and astonished if told about it. It is not exactly easy to say definitely how much percentage a farmer ought by right to earn on his capital, but we suggest from experience, looking at the profits in other businesses and the social standing expected of farmers, that not less than ten per cent. on large farms, up to twenty per cent. on those of a smaller size, is not out of the way. Accepting these limits, let us now

see how the income is usually made up. It will be more definite to take a medium sized farm, of say 250 acres of mixed husbandry, and work the figures out for this by way of example.

The capital employed now-a-days is by no means so much as many people believe. In past years it was reckoned that £8 to £10 per acre was necessary for the proper equipment of the farm, but it is doubtful if many reached this figure. Now-a-days about half this sum represents the value of the tenant's live and dead stock, a fact which any one can prove for himself by summing up the value on farms he is acquainted with. The fall in the price of produce has of course rendered it necessary for a correspondingly low figure in the capital, and on a farm of 250 acres £1,250, or £5 per acre, will be sufficient under ordinary circumstances; some might need a deal more, but we know of many working away successfully with less. Fourteen per cent. on this sum would be £175 of a yearly income to the tenant. If the rent (and tithe) were £350, the income, according to the Income Tax Commissioners, would correspond with these figures. A few more calculations will show us how this sum is usually made up. A farm of this size has usually a house which—with its garden, outhouses, pony stable, and other appurtenances—ought to be worth £30 per annum for rent, and very likely may be assessed on this sum for Inhabited House Duty; this represents 2·4 per cent on the capital. Most farmers keep a cow for the use of their families, and as a cow's produce is worth, on the average, about £20 per annum we have a further 1·6 per cent. on capital. Again, a very large proportion of the farming community keep a pony and trap; the pony is fed by produce off the farm, which will amount to at least 10s. per week in value, or, say, £25 per annum. Farmers' ponies are of course very seldom kept wholly for private use or pleasure, but are usually expected to do a share of work on the farm, while driving to market is, or ought to be, a matter of business. We will be justified, however, in charging one-half of the annual cost to the private account of the owner—that is £12 10s., or a further profit of one per cent. on the capital. Besides these things there are a great number of odds and ends which a man and his family derive from their farm. Poultry are usually kept and fed off the farm produce; the eggs and the fowls used ought to be reckoned at market value. A sheep or a fat calf of home-rearing is occasionally killed for use, this is practically income, just as if hard cash had been actually received, for a townsman would have to buy these and the foregoing items out of his salary or wages. If a farmer pulls a turnip, or digs a few potatoes out of the field for family use, in all fairness the farm ought to be credited and the house debited for the market value of

these. There are thus many little items not thought worth accounting for, but which save a farmer's pocket many a pound during the course of the year, and we may put down at least a further £12 10s., or one per cent., under this head. All these reckoned up amount to £75, or 6 per cent. per annum on the £1,250 of capital; that is to say, the tenant receives a living from the farm [income] to this extent without having a single penny in cash. In order to attain to the 14 per cent. allowed, therefore, he must receive 8 per cent. in actual money, or £100. We opine it would be difficult for a farmer occupying 250 acres of land to prove that he is *not* receiving this sum per annum. A farm on which the yearly sales ought to run up to £1,400, and possibly £1,600, will surely leave a balance of £100 to the creditor side of the cash book. If it does not, and the tenant is farming as he ought to, then the rent is certainly too high. We have already shown that a man and a pair of horses less on a farm will save this £100 alone, while a reduction of 25 per cent. on the rent will go a long way to help, not to speak of the other items in which there is room for improvement. Corresponding figures will be found to work out in the case of other farms and with different amounts of capital, and so often will this be found the case that we have within the last year or two come to the conclusion that the "the depression" is not so desperate a matter as many suppose.

The fact of the matter is that as very few farmers keep books of any kind they have not the slightest idea what their income is, or the amount of interest they earn on capital. They keep living on in very nearly the same comfortable style they were always used to, think they ought to accumulate a balance at the bankers', and because they do not, but find themselves short at the end of the year, immediately conclude that it is all due to the bad times, and that farming is a wretched occupation. In very many cases a simple set of books, such as are advertised every week in the farm papers, filled up with the payments and receipts as these take place, would put matters in a very different light at the end of the year. In short, one of the ways of meeting the times is to adapt one's scale of living to suit the capital invested; and book-keeping on a limited scale will show up what the figures are.

It may be objected that a farmer occupying 250 acres of land ought to have a greater income than £175, of which £75 is received in kind. If this is so then we have got to readjust all our previous notions and arrangements on the subject. Fourteen per cent. on capital would be considered very good in any other trade, while it corresponds with the half-rent allowed by the Income Tax authorities. In Scotland the allowance, of course, is one third of the rent, but the figures would

work out the same, as the sample farm chosen would be correspondingly let at £525, or 42s. per acre. If more money were invested on the same land, as might easily be done, then, of course, the same rate of interest would yield more income; but this is a matter depending on individual circumstances.

At one time it used to be the rule that the produce of a farm was divided by three—one third for rent, one third for labour, and one third to the tenant. Competition for farms has long ago, however, reduced the farmer's share down to about a fifth, irrespective of the fall in prices, and very few men ever attained to an income equal to or above the rent. But modern farming has rendered it necessary to allow a sum equivalent to the rent for purchased manures or feeding stuffs, while the labour bill will in many cases exceed the landlord's share. It is therefore necessary now-a-days to divide the produce by four, and allow a fourth each for rent, labour, foods and fertilizers, and tenant. The latter will very seldom realise so large a share, but we have found this a pretty safe rule in practice, as it allows a margin for accidents and unforeseen losses which are sure to arise. It certainly would be a very pleasant thing for us tenant farmers if we could be sure of an income equal to the rent, but as that would amount to about 28 or 30 per cent. in the case of the example farm given, and would be over 20 per cent. in any case, it is more than we can ever attain to, and is honestly more than we have any right to expect. Practical men, however, will adopt this or a similar rule if they want to make a fair living and keep up to their bargain, as they will find their fourth share has a lot of demands coming against it, and it will very often dwindle down to 14 or 15 per cent. when put into actual practice.

There is one other point in which keeping a proper set of books would be of the utmost importance, and that is in showing us which departments of the farm pay best, and in which there is a loss. It is not enough that we should know at the end of the year the slump sum gained or lost on an occupation as a whole, but it is necessary to know how each department stands by itself. This would bring out some valuable facts, and might enable a farmer to avoid certain losses and increase other gains. It might be found that sheep pay better than bullocks: this would show a man to keep more sheep and fewer bullocks. Or oats might pay better than barley or wheat, and so on. One particular item of expenditure might be found unduly large: this ought to lead to an enquiry to enable it to be made less in the future. It is not necessary to keep a formal set of books by double entry, but we can speak from experience as to the benefits to be derived from a little clerking work, and it is certain that there has been many a farmer lost for want of keeping his accounts properly.

## EDUCATION.

On the proper education of the present generation of farming youths will depend much of the future success of British agriculture. By education is meant not only the knowledge taught in ordinary schools, which every child must now learn, but the higher and more difficult subjects comprised in the various sciences which have a bearing on the art of farming. It has long been the custom for so-called practical men—especially those of the “old school”—to sneer at science and maintain that a knowledge of the laws of nature is of no use to farmers. This belief arose from the fact that some scientific men, who had no *practical* knowledge, have been conspicuous failures in farming, or in giving advice to farmers. This has never been the fault of science, however, but the fault of the men who professed a knowledge of science. But it is easy to show on the other side of the question that the men who have been going to the bad during the years of reduced prices are largely those who are “practical” men, or, at least, go under that name. If any one were asked to name a scientific man who had failed the chances are he would not be able to do so, for the simple reason that scientific farmers are scarcely more plentiful than white crows. We have given a great deal of attention to this branch of the subject, yet we are not acquainted with much over half-a-dozen farmers who are entitled to be called scientific. All of these, however, are successful men and notables in their own localities—some of them known far beyond these. We have never known any who were losers by a knowledge of scientific principles, but could enumerate scores who would have saved a lot of money if, in addition to their practical skill, they had had some knowledge of science. The great point to be remembered is that it is not by science alone nor yet by practice alone that farming is to become a paying business, but by both combined. Farmers, in addition to their practical skill (which might be vastly improved) ought to be trained in the theory of their profession, and then they would be able to make the most of everything. They ought to understand the chemistry of manures, soils, and foods; the anatomy and physiology of the plants and animals they work with; and the ordinary physical laws which govern nature. A man who has studied these things will know the proper foods and manures to use, will not be taken in in purchasing them, and thus be able to save many a pound, without counting on the better general returns from a farm properly managed. If anything goes wrong his scientific knowledge will help him to find out the cause, and thus set it right, or avoid it in future. In short, there is no limit to the possibilities of good and successful farming when a man, in



addition to his practical skill, can render a reason for, or understands the principle of, everything he is doing.

The belief in the necessity for a scientific education is gradually gaining ground, and though it is not likely, nor is it advisable, that the older farmers among us should bother with it after middle age, yet farmers' sons and the younger men ought to do something in this line. It is a good sign that the scientific experts of our various agricultural societies are fully employed, while the agricultural colleges and classes which are springing up are more and more patronised. Much can be done by an earnest minded youth at home during the winter evenings, and a few pounds invested in books will put the best authors within his reach, but, if possible, he should attend classes for a winter, or better still for two winters. It is not the object of this essay to give a treatise on agricultural education—much as the author would like to do so—and the various colleges are generally too expensive for ordinary farmers' sons, but it may be mentioned that the finest training in the world can be had in London, Edinburgh, and some other places for £30 or £40 for the winter five months, everything included. The practical part is best learnt at home, while the farmer with only £175 per annum of an income ought to be able to scrape this sum together for the benefit of his son, more especially if the latter is a working youth, as he ought to be.

Farmers better educated in *both* the practice and science of farming are what we badly need, for the ability to do all the foregoing things as to rent, labour, cropping, book-keeping, &c., properly, entails a high order of intelligence and scientific knowledge. It is certain that in the future, whatever it may have been in the past, the bucolic man, whose mind can hold only one or two ideas about "mutton and turmuts," will die out, and his place be taken by the man who can not only hold the plough as well as any of his men but is also a gentleman of education and intelligence. It is pleasant to contemplate the fact that some of the best intellects the world has ever seen have been devoted to the advancement of the art and science of agriculture.

#### LEASEHOLDERS.

To nearly all that has been said in the foregoing there is one exception, and one exception only, though that includes a very large proportion of the tenant farmers of the three kingdoms. It is comprised in those who are still running leases contracted ten years ago, when prices were much higher than now. In many parts of the country it has been the custom from time immemorial to take farms on long leases, and we come now to consider their case. It is in Scotland specially where this

system has reached its highest development and given the best results. The usual length of a lease there has been for 19 years; why this particular number should have been fixed on no man can tell. In past generations there is not the slightest doubt but that it has been of immense service to tenant farmers, and to it has been largely due the development of a class of men who are truly recognised as the best farmers in the world, everything considered. Before foreign competition became a factor to be taken into account it was pretty certain that as things had been so would they be in the future, and therefore men were sure on entering a lease that prices and everything else would remain the same all through. Further, whenever a bad harvest occurred the natural result was that the prices of produce rose so that the total receipts of the farmer kept much alike one year with another. The country, of course, was oftentimes on the verge of a famine, and the lower classes often starved, while bread riots were common in these "bad old times." Free trade has changed all this, and a good thing too, and now produce is not only low priced, but a good or a bad year in this country has no appreciable effect in altering the prices. Farmers, therefore, in those times were doing the best possible thing to take as long a lease as possible at a fair rent, for this ensured them "fixity of tenure" for a certain time, and therefore whatever improvements they were inclined to make in the way of manuring, lining, building, draining, &c., they were certain to reap the benefit of without any danger of a rise in the rent until their term had expired. Now-a-days all this is altered, however; prices are always low, so that a bad harvest or a succession of them is often ruinous, and if the rent and other expenses remain the same it is manifest the tenant will soon have to pay his way out of capital and eventually wind up altogether. That such has been a common experience is manifest to all, and the opinion is becoming general that the lease system has served its purpose and will be superseded by one or two years' notice to quit on either side. It is not the only fault of unexpired old leases that they compel a man to pay a high rent in the face of falling prices, but often the restrictions are calculated to do infinite harm. There are not wanting cases where tenants could keep on paying the old rents if certain clauses in their agreements were cancelled, so that they could make the most of their land. It is of no use advising and urging men to lay down to grass, to keep dairy cows, to grow hay for sale, &c., if they are bound to a certain course of cropping and sale of produce. Of course any one who would sign such an agreement now-a-days must be very foolish and shortsighted; but we did not know that ten years ago, nor even five. No one could foresee the great change which has taken place since then,

and therefore those who are still held to old agreements are an exception to what has been said about meeting the depression, and are to be sincerely pitied. Those landlords who demand full payment under such circumstances are no doubt within their legal rights, but, apart from their lack of generosity, they are certainly not wise. It is a mistake, which will tell in the long run against themselves, to ruin their tenants and then cast them off, when a little timely aid would preserve them. The system of giving a return of 10 or 20 per cent. must, no doubt, be very acceptable to men struggling to make ends meet, but it must have a demoralising effect on the recipients. If it is an acknowledged fact that a farm is too highly rented then the better plan is to let the tenant free altogether, or have a re-valuation. In many instances, as already mentioned, a reduction in the rent is not necessary if certain improvements were carried out, or more freedom given to the tenant as to the style of farming. Each case should be treated on its own merits, and we venture to say that landlords would eventually be gainers by following this policy. How often have we known instances where the overtures of an old tenant were refused, and he had to clear out, while, before very long, the landlord has had to accept much worse terms from an incomer. The old man ought to know best the value of the land he has farmed for perhaps half a lifetime, but his offer is refused as the owner insists on a certain figure; the farm is vacant for a time, as no one will give what the owner wants, and eventually it is let at a great deal less than was offered at first. We have known of extreme cases where tenants have got free by withholding the rent, and allowing themselves to be declared bankrupt. This method was certainly effectual in getting rid of the farm, but it is not exactly justifiable, while a tenant must be in desperate circumstances to resort to it.

It is to be supposed that any one who has been "caught" with a lease, and survives to the end, or gets free, will never entangle himself again. A short notice on either side is much the better arrangement for both parties, and if a tenant is making a fresh bargain, under existing circumstances, it is presumed he knows what he is about, and therefore has no one to blame but himself if he makes a mess of it. Under the Agricultural Holdings Act a tenant is perfectly safe to farm well, while the landlord is perfectly safe to allow the tenant to make the most of everything, seeing he can claim damages for deterioration. It is, therefore, the best policy now-a-days for a tenant to ram his land full of manure and grow maximum crops up to the end.

## LEGISLATION.

There is comparatively little more that Parliament can do for us. If we grant that agriculture is suffering from the general wave of depression which has overtaken nearly all trades, then ours has no better right than any of the others to special legislation. The fixing of rents, of the length of a contract, and of the various points in the management of a farm are all matters which ought to be left to the parties concerned and the operation of the law of supply and demand. It is presumed that landlord and tenant are of age and in full possession of their faculties. If Parliament needs to interfere in such matters, then they must be reckoned unfit to manage their own business. The Agricultural Holdings Act is a great boon and has rendered leases unnecessary, but it requires to be a little more thorough yet. If everything else were right, however, and both parties left free and untrammelled, it would not be so very needful. The defect in it is that an evil-disposed landlord can block all improvements, except draining or manuring, no matter how necessary they may be. If the tenant had the right of appeal against his landlord's decision, either to arbiters or to a court that should say whether the proposed improvements were necessary or not, the matter would be much better. Its action hitherto has been to punish bad farmers quite as much as it has compelled ungenerous landlords to pay for what good men leave behind them, and it is good that it is so. At present, however, farmers are not free agents in taking a farm, and this is one of the few matters in which a further alteration of the laws could help us. As previously mentioned, there is in England what is called the Law of Distress, and in Scotland the "Act of Sederunt" takes the place of Hypothec: both of these have been the source of incalculable evil to farmers for generations back, and though their influence has not been very prominent it has been none the less certain. The preference given to the landlord's claims made him quite safe in accepting "the highest or any offer," irrespective of the tenant's want of skill, capital, or general fitness. Provided only he gave the highest rent, agreed to all restrictions, and could get the farm stocked somehow, the landlord could not possibly lose anything. Thus *bonâ fide* good intelligent men, who wished to make a fair profit, had always a lot of reckless "men of straw" to compete against, and this so handicapped them that they never had any chance to get a fair understanding about cropping, compensation, &c. It was no doubt a very comfortable arrangement for the landlord and his agent, but its unfairness to all who dealt with farmers and to farmers themselves is manifest to all except to a

Parliament composed of landowners. If the owner is paid no rent at all he is only losing the interest on the value of his land, while the principal (the land) always comes back to him, oftentimes improved; but if a tradesman supplies goods to a farmer who becomes bankrupt, he loses both principal and interest. As it is the landlord who brings the tenant into a locality, the fairest way would be to let him suffer equally with the others.

Certainly there is not so much harm done by these matters now to the farming community, for a landlord who cannot get tenants for his vacant farms will be inclined to talk reason to any would-be tenant; but in some districts there are still twenty men after every farm, and anything which gives the landlord an unfair advantage ought to be removed.

Some men have tried to throw dust in our eyes by agitating for a reduction of taxes and tithe. However much we would like to see these monies applied to better purposes, it is certain that their reduction, or even total abolition, would not affect the pockets of farmers in the slightest degree, with the exception of those unfortunate individuals who have leases. When a man takes a farm he finds out how much these charges amount to, and offers correspondingly less rent. If they were reduced in amount then he would offer a correspondingly higher rent, so that it makes no difference in the total. The person who is really affected is the landlord, and if he does not kick against the imposition the farmer need not trouble himself about it. A fall of a shilling or two per acre, however, cannot make such a difference to a tenant, even if he were to get the benefit of it, while it certainly would not save him from bankruptcy if he were on the road to it.

### CO-OPERATION.

It would be a first-class arrangement if co-operation in working a farm and selling the produce would work in practice. Unfortunately, however, we have no unqualified and permanent successes in this line to point out by way of example, but rather the reverse. A grocery store, or almost any other business, can be run on this principle, but when you apply it to a farm it breaks down. It seems as if the extra risks and troubles which farming encounters in the shape of bad weather, disease among stock, &c., were too much for it, and co-operative farms have never yet been a success. Apparently, we cannot improve on the old style of landlord, tenant, and labourer.

Co-operation in selling produce, however, promises a much better chance of success, and it is to be hoped that it will extend. It has long been a complaint that the middleman fleeced both the farmer and

the consumer, and, though middlemen are often very useful, it is certain that if the farmer could sell direct to his town customer he would get a larger return while the purchaser would pay less. If farmers would join together to keep their own stores in town, and sell beef, mutton, dairy produce, &c., there is every chance of success, while there is a wide margin to come and go upon. The good results which have attended the beginnings of this new departure augur well for the future.

### CONCLUSION.

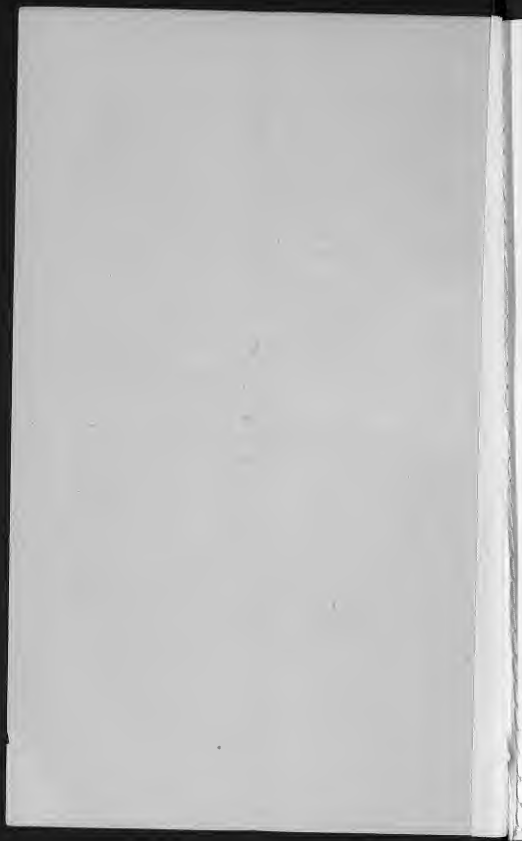
It will be seen from all that has been said that the depression is not to be met by any heroic measures such as protection, fixity of tenure, judicial rents, growing fruit, peasant proprietary, &c., &c., but by landlords and farmers adjusting themselves to the altered times. If a man offers only as much rent as he expects to be able to pay easily; looks after the practical management personally as much as possible, so that his men always work to some purpose; alters the style of cropping or stock to suit circumstances, but especially to reduce the number of men and horses necessary; alters his own personal and family habits to suit a reduced income; keeps books, like any other business man, to know how he stands; and lastly, but not least, increases his own intelligence by mastering the scientific principles of the work he is doing—if all these things are done he will find little to complain about, and these lie with himself. Only men with old leases cannot do *all* these, but those of us who have made the necessary alterations believe that there is no better occupation than farming. We have, of course, "bad years," when the weather is against us and crops are inferior—and there was a succession of them not very long ago—but a tenant should allow for these in his estimates, while it must be borne in mind that skill and energy will go far to counteract Nature's deficiencies. We have seen crops well saved in a wet harvest, and good crops grown in spite of too much cold and wet or a burning drought, simply because the farmer was up to his business and "aye ready."

The ignorance—the culpable ignorance—and negligence of many landlords has done much to bring things to their present state. Some owners seem quite unaware of the fact that land-owning is a business which requires to be learnt like any other, and that it is their duty to do something more than merely receive the rents and come down in the autumn to the annual slaughter of birds and beasts reared on their tenants' crops. A man of this sort is not capable of managing an estate, and as a result a whole community suffers. He is not qualified to select the best tenants for his farms and thus gradually raise the agricultural

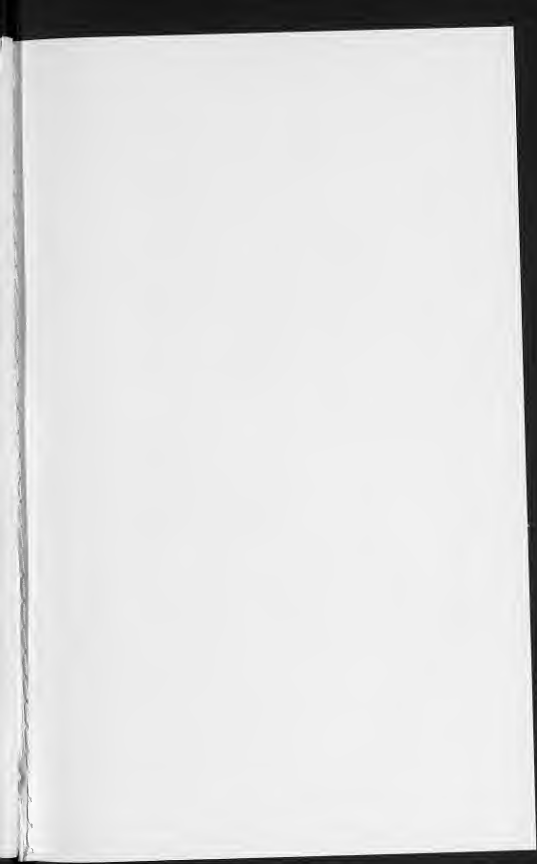
character of the occupiers, but as often as not takes a smooth-tongued sycophant, whose conscience is easy at election times but whose farming is a disgrace to be seen, while the "man of independent mind," who would have been a credit to the estate, is passed over. Just as the general character of the farm servants is due to the kind of masters they have served, so do the tenants reflect the type of landlord they hold land from. A man can do much, as the preceding pages are intended to show, to help himself, but if he is under an inferior landlord it becomes rather a hopeless task. The improvement of the latter, therefore, must in many cases take precedence of everything else, as on him really depends the condition of the estate and all connected therewith.

But after all, the fact of the matter is there never was a better time to take land than the present. Tenants have now everything their own way, and can practically dictate terms to the unfortunate owners, for if they do not get everything they want in reason there is plenty of land for them to try elsewhere. For such the depression is past, if it ever pressed them very hard: the Ground Game Act, and the Agricultural Holdings Act, together with a short notice to quit, gives them scope to make the most of their land, or leave it if anything arises to render their tenancy unpleasant.

The depression has done a vast deal of good along with its evil. We have got some obnoxious laws abolished and some good ones brought in, with "more to follow," all through it; while the weakly and inferior men have all been driven out of the running—"killed off"—so that those who remain are likely to be the best, and for them everything is rendered easier from the lessened competition, with the possibility of things improving still further yet. In short, farmers' prospects never were better: if they have not yet accommodated themselves to the present state of matters nothing but an old lease prevents them: if they are not capable of undergoing this accommodation then the sooner we are rid of such the better. We who have done what is put down herein are eminently satisfied with the result, and believe that the depression in agriculture is now a thing of the past, as far as capable tenant-farmers are concerned.







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